

WORDCRAFT DICTIONARY, T

Note: clickable items link to Wordcraft Archives, which may have further notes

tabby – *toponym*: **1.** silk taffeta (originally striped), *esp.* with a moiré finish **2.** a striped or brindled cat; or a she-cat (further, obscure meanings are omitted)

tabula rasa – an absence of preconceived ideas or predetermined goals

tachygrapher – one who writes shorthand; a stenographer

tachygraphy – shorthand; the art of rapid writing

tacky [etymology] – **1.** in neglected disrepair **2.** in bad taste or offensive

tadger; todger – *Brit. slang from the 1950s*: penis (affectionately)

tadoma – [eponym] a way for a deaf-blind person to "hear" a conversation by touch

taffeta – a fine crisp lustrous fabric

tafumtu – see *snafu*

take to the woodshed (or '**to woodshed**') – *U.S. politics*: **1. orig.:** to 'grill' someone brutally, in private; to subject to no-holds-barred questioning **2. more commonly:** to criticize scathingly

talisman – an object as a charm to avert evil or good fortune; *figuratively*, something producing apparently magical or miraculous effects

tall boy – *slang*: a 16-ounce beer can

tall poppy syndrome – cutting down to size anyone who sets himself up as superior

talus¹ (*plural taluses*) – a sloping mass of loose rock at the foot of a cliff (*also*, a like slope of an earthwork or tapering wall)

talus² (*plural tali*) – the anklebone [also called the **astragalus**]

tamp – to pack down such matter as powder, sand, coffee grounds, tobacco

Note: sources simply say "ram down" or "pack down". Wordcrafter suggests 'tamp' pertains only to "loose" small matter: you can ram a spike into the ground, or pack down items in a suitcase, but you would not tamp them.

tampion – a cover or a wooden plug for the muzzle of a gun, to keep it clean and dry

tandem – one behind the other (as bicycle-riders, carriage-horses, or airplane cockpits) [a pun on Latin *tandem* 'at length', which refers to a length of *time*.]

tanner – *British slang*: the old sixpence (see *coins and currency*)

TANSTAAFL – the principle, "There **Ain't No Such Thing As A Free Lunch**"

tantrony – *eponym*: the runt of a litter; *also*, the smallest bell in a church; *also*, one who constantly, obsequiously follows after another

Taplevism – *eponym*: optimism in the most hopeless circumstances [a very rare word]

tarantella – *toponym*: rapid whirling South Italian dance, once thought to be the sovereign remedy for tarantism [Note: in this context, *sovereign* means "of the utmost potency".]

tarantism – *toponym*: a disorder characterized by an uncontrollable urge to dance

tarantula – *toponym*: a large black wolf spider of southern Europe (or similar hairy spiders of the Americas)

tarantulate – to excite or govern the emotions by music

tarassia – male hysteria. How interesting that our language persists in almost-exclusively use of the term **hysteria**, which is feminine (from Greek for "womb")

tarfu – see *snafu*

tarn – a lake that develops in the basin of a cirque (more generally, a [small mountain lake](#))

Tartarean – *toponym*: hellish, infernal [from *Tartarus*, a section of Hades reserved for punishment of the wicked]

tartuffe – *eponym*: a hypocrite, *esp.* who affects piety

tattersall – *toponym*: *noun & adj.* a cloth with a pattern of dark lines forming squares on a light background; the pattern itself

taurine – like a bull

tautology – **1.** an empty statement which is, by definition true. (Either we'll go or we'll stay.) **2.** redundancy

taw – a large choice or fancy marble, often streaked or variegated, being that with which the player shoots

tawdry – *eponym*: gaudy and cheap; *also, by extension*: sordid; sleazy: *her tawdry past*

tawse – a leather strap used for disciplining children

taxis – see *tropism* (not 'taxicabs'!)

taxonomy – classification of plants and animals; classification and categorization generally

Taylorism – *eponym*: the principles or practice of the Taylor system of management

teave – *dial.*: work; struggle

telamon – (pl. *telamones*) a figure of a man used as a supporting column (synonym *atlas* [pl. *atlantes*]; the female version, *caryatid*, is much more common)

telematics – the branch of information technology dealing with long-distance transmission of computerized information

teleology – the philosophical study of purpose

tempean – (*of a place*) of great and delightful natural beauty (*a very rare word*)

temper (metals) – to harden by alternately heating and cooling

temulent – drunken, intoxicated

tendentious – highly partisan; marked by a strong tendency in favor of a particular point of view

tender offer (oxymoron) – a general, public offer to buy a firm's stock at a premium price

tenebrism – a style of painting in which most of the figures are engulfed in shadow but some are dramatically illuminated by a beam of light

tentiginous – **1.** stiff; stretched; strained. **2.** lustful, or pertaining to lust

teosinte – a tall grass of Mexican/Central American, related to corn/maize and cultivated for fodder

tephra – solid matter ejected into the air by an erupting volcano

tephromancy – divination by ashes [dictionary at *mancy* lists 54 form of divination]

tergiversate – **1.** to change sides; abandon a cause; apostatize **2.** to equivocate; to evade by deliberate ambiguity

termagant – *eponym*: an or overbearing, quarrelsome or nagging woman; a shrew

terminus ante quem – the latest possible date of a past occurrence; the date by which it must have occurred ['limit before which']. Also known as **terminus ad quem**.

terminus post quem – the earliest possible date of a past occurrence; the date after which it must have occurred ['limit after which']. Also known as **terminus a quo**.

terp – *slang*: an interpreter

terpsichorean – *eponym*: *noun*: a dancer. *adj.* relating to dancing

terrane – "an accretion that has collided with a continental nucleus, or '**craton**', but can be recognized by the foreign origin of its rock strata" (Wikipedia)

terrapin – one of certain small freshwater turtles [Algonquin. The earlier form, *torope*, had by coincidence curious similarity to *torpor*.]

testaceous – reddish-brown (brick-colored) or brownish-yellow (also – pertaining to shells; hard-shelled)

tester bed – a four-poster bed topped by a wooden canopy

testiculose – "that hath great Cods" (Grose's *Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue*)

tetchy – mildly testy; irritable; grumpy

tête-à-tête – **1.** a private conversation between two persons **2.** a sofa for two. *adj.* & *adv.*: without the intrusion of a third person; in intimate privacy

thalassocracy – maritime supremacy; command of the seas (naval power *or* commercial power) (**thalassocrat**)

thalian – *eponym*: pertaining to comedy; comic

thank-you-ma'am – a ridge or hollow across a road to turn aside rain-water [from the sudden bowing of a person, caused by the pitching of a vehicle in crossing such a place]

Thatcherism – the political policy of Margaret Thatcher

thaumaturgy – making magic or miracles (derivatives: *thaumaturge*, *thaumaturgist*, *thaumaturgus*, *thaumaturgise*, and

thaumatrope)

the 400 – see *four hundred*

theave – a ewe lamb of the first year; *also*, a sheep three years old

thenar – the fleshy mass on the palm of the hand at the base of the thumb

theodolite – a surveying instrument with a rotating telescope, for measuring horizontal and vertical angles

theologaster – a petty or contemptible theologian

theomancy – divination by pretending to divine by the revelation of the Spirit, and by the Scriptures, or word of God
[dictionary at *mancy* lists 54 form of divination]

therblig – *eponym*: a basic elements in a task or manual operation. Gilbreth coined the word, basically his own name spelled backwards

theremin – considered the first electronic musical instrument, invented in 1919 by Russian born Lev Sergeivitch Termen, which he anglicized to Leon Theremin

theriomancy – divination by beasts [dictionary at *mancy* lists 54 form of divination]

thersitical – *eponym*: loud and abusive; foul-mouthed, scurrilous

thespian – *eponym*: an actor or actress; *also*, related to drama and the theater

thill – either of the two long shafts between which an animal is fastened when pulling a wagon

thin red line – a small but valiant line of defense standing between victory and defeat. ["thin blue line" is also used, when referring to police.]

think piece – a thought-provoking, speculative writing

third estate – the commons (especially in Britain or France) viewed as forming a political order having representation in a parliament

thirlable – that may be thirled or pierced; penetrable

thole – a wooden peg, set in pairs in a boat's gunwales, to serve as an oarlock

thorp; thorpe – a village or hamlet

thrasonical – *eponym*: boastful, bragging, vainglorious

three-tailed bavalorus – a comical and mythical beast of the northwestern United States <wink>

throe – a severe pang or spasm of pain, as in childbirth

through-line – unifying element of a scene, play, book, etc.

thrum – to make a continuous rhythmic humming sound [with the suggestion of suppressed power about to break forth]
(*noun*: the sound itself)

thrunched – very angry, displeased [*obsolete*; from *The Word Museum* by J. Kacirk]

thrutch – to push or to squeeze out

tilde – the ~ sign

tilth – the physical condition of particular soil (*less commonly*: tilled ground)

Timbuktu – a extremely remote place. **going to Timbuktu** – going to extremes

timorous (also [here](#)) – timid; or expressing timidity

tin god – a self-important and overbearing person (esp. a minor official)

ting – a light and clear metallic sound, as of a small bell (*verb*: to give off that sound)

tinking (knitting) – un-knitting; carefully taking each stitch back ["tink" is "knit" spelled backwards]

tintinnabulation – a tinkling sound, as of a bell or bells

tip-off – (from basketball) *figurative*: the commencement of an other extended activity

titan – *eponym*: one of prodigious size, strength, or achievement

titch; tich; titchy – *eponym*: very small

titian – *eponym*: a brownish orange

titivate – to spruce up

titubate – to stumble or stagger; *also*, to rock or reel, like a curved-bottom bowl on a table. **titubation** – a staggered or

unbalanced gait

titular – **1.** relating to a title **2.** holding or constituting a formal position or title without any real authority. [Anyone who thought otherwise has a dirty mind!]

toad-eater – a fawning flatterer, parasite, sycophant (also called a **toady**)

toad-in-the-hole – *Brit:* sausages cooked in batter. Delicious. [Recipe](#)

toadstool – an umbrella-shaped mushroom, typically a poisonous or inedible one

Tobacco Road – a squalid poverty-stricken rural area or community

tocology – the science of childbirth; midwifery or obstetrics

tocsin – the ringing of an alarm bell (or the bell itself); *extended*, an alarm

Tom and Jerry – *eponym:* a hot sweetened drink of rum, water and spices and a separately-beaten egg

Tom Collins – *eponym:* a collins drink with a base of gin

Tom Swiftie – a wellerism based on a punning adverb

tomcat – *eponym:* a male cat (*to tomcat:* [of a man] to pursue women promiscuously)

Tommy Atkins – *eponym:* a British soldier

tommy gun – *eponym:* a Thomson (or other) submachine gun

tonal language – a language that uses pitch as an intrinsic part of the meaning (Many East Asian languages are tonal, as are many from Africa and Central America.)

tonneau – **1.** the rear seating compartment, in a car with separate front/rear compartments (e.g., a London cab) **2.** the open area behind the front rear seats, in an open-top car (e.g., a two-seater sports car) or a pick-up truck

tontine – *eponym:* a pooled fund where the entire fund goes to the last-surviving participant

toothsome – **1.** temptingly tasty to the mouth **2.** attractive, alluring (*esp.*, sexually appealing to the eye)

tope – to habitually drink alcohol excessively

toponym – the name of a place, *or* a word derived from a place name

topophysis – the growth response of a plant part depending on its orientation or position on the plant

Topsy ("grewed like topsy") – *eponym:* "grewed like Topsy": figure of speech for growing by itself, without apparent design or intention

toque [rhymes with *poke*] – **1.** the [chef's hat](#), tall and white (more fully, *toque blanche*) **2.** a certain small [woman's hat](#), brimless and close-fitting. (Also, see *tuque*.)

torii – a [Japanese gateway](#) of light construction, often put at the entrance to a Shinto shrine. two posts and two crosspieces. [from Japanese for "bird's nest"]

torpid – sluggish, in mind or in body [*noun:* torpor]

torschlusspanik (literally "shut door panic") – a sense of panic in middle age brought on by the feeling that life is passing you by. **But** the term has broad application; one finds it defined or applied as

- (a) middle-aged men pursuing young women for a final fling "before the gates close";
- (b) young women fearing they will not be married until they are too old to have children;
- (c) the woman who longs to rediscover the excitement of youth and fears being left "on the shelf" (OED);
- (d) a rush to get in on a financial opportunity before the door shuts

tosheroon – *British slang:* the half-crown coin (see *coins and currency*)

tossplot – a drunkard

touchstone – a standard or criterion used to judge something's quality or genuineness

tourbillion – **1.** *lit. or fig.:* a whirling mass or system; a vortex; a whirl; an eddy, a whirlpool. **2.** a firework which spins as it rises, forming a spiral or scroll of fire

tournure – **1.** graceful manner or bearing **2.** a woman's bustle or other padding "to give shapeliness" to her waist or hips

Toyko Rose – *eponym:* occasionally used to mean one broadcasting negative propaganda to military troops

tragus (also [here](#)) – the fleshy bump of cartilage, on the ear, in front of the ear-hole

tralatitious – passed along from generation to generation [Wordcrafter note: but not in the sense of an heirloom (complimentary) but rather in the negative sense of "dubious received wisdom; fossilized doctrine".]

tramontane – *adj:* from another country; foreign (*noun* a foreigner). [*also*, "on the far side of the mountains"; *also*, a certain wind blowing across the Alps]

tranquillityite – *toponym*: a certain mineral not of earth, found in the Sea of *Tranquility*, on the moon

transmogrify – to change into a different shape or form, *esp.* one that is fantastic or bizarre

transpire – to become known; to come to light (Note – often used to mean “occur” or “happen”. But though some language experts find this usage acceptable, even they call it pretentious and pompous.)

treacly – cloyingly sweet

treasury bond (or *T-bond*) – long-term debt of a government, issued as a tradable security

trebucket – see *cucking stool*

tregetry – **1.** juggling **2.** deception; trickery

tremulous – shaking slightly, quivering, as with nervousness, timidity, or excitement

trencher – a wooden board or platter, for carving or serving food

trencherman – a hearty eater

trendelenburg position – supine (lying on one's back) and tilted with the head down

trepan^{1,2} – **1.** to ensnare or entrap (*noun*: a snare; *or*, a trickster) **2.** an old surgical instrument to cut into the skull to relieve pressure (or a like boring instrument for mining). (*verb*: to use a trepan; to bore.)

trepid – timid; timorous

trepidacious – fearful; agitated; trembling

trepidate – [Ciardi's coinage, not in dictionaries] to put forth tentatively; to propose (an idea)

trichobezoar – a *bezoar* in a person, from *trichophagia*

trichophagia – chronic pulling and eating of hair

tricolor – **1.** a flag having three stripes **2.** the French flag

trifecta – a bet where the bettor must name the top *three* finishers, in order

trilby – *eponym*: a felt hat with a narrow brim creased crown

trilithon – a monument of three stones, two uprights with a crosspiece on top, as in Stonehenge

trime – US silver 3-cent piece (see *coins and currency*)

triolet – a poem of 8 lines, with the 1st repeated as the 4th and 7th, and the 2nd repeated as the last

tritanopia – complete blue-yellow colorblindness

Tritonis – a mythical lake near the Mediterranean coast of Libya

triumvirate – a commission or ruling body of three persons (**triumvir** – a member of a triumvirate)

trivial – (interesting etymology; see Archives)

trochaic – see *iambic*

troche – (two syllables; vowel sounds as in SHOW-me) a medicated lozenge used to soothe the throat. The same lozenge could also be called a **pastille**.

troglydyte – **1.** a cave-dweller **2.** one who is reclusive, reactionary, out of date, or brutish

troilism – a *ménage à trois*; a sexual relationship involving three people

Trojan – a virus which infects another program: when you launch the program, the virus gets launched [see *malware*]

Trojan horse – *toponym*: someone or something intended to defeat or subvert from within usually by deceptive means [also used in computerese]

tropism – involuntary response of an organism turning toward or away from external stimulus; *e.g.*, a plant turning toward the sun. (Usually applied to plants; in a microorganism it is usually called **taxis**.)

trouvaille – a lucky find; a windfall; something interesting, amusing, or beneficial discovered by chance

troy – *toponym*; *Troyes, France*: a system of weights, used mainly for precious metals and gems, with a pound of 12 ounce

truckle – to act servilely or submissively to another

truncheon – *Brit*: a short thick **stick** carried as a weapon, as by a British police officer

truthiness – the quality of stating concepts one wishes or believes to be true, rather than the facts [American Dialect Society's word of the year for 2005]

tsatske – *Yiddish*: **1.** a cheap trinket **2.** a young woman kept as a rich man's toy

tsunami – a wave caused by underwater earthquake or volcano. Huge at harbor, but it crosses ocean imperceptibly small and at jet speed. NOTE: dictionaries do not note that term is often used metaphorically. Also, often misused literally as "a huge wave". From Japanese *tsu* harbor + *nami* wave.

tu quoque [Latin for "you too," or more loosely, "So's your old man."] – a retort charging an adversary with doing what he criticizes in others

tuber – see *geophyte*

tub-thumping – *adj. or noun*: a forceful, violent or ranting impassioned speech, based more on emotion than reason

tumbrel; tumbrel – a two-wheeled cart, especially a farmer's cart that can be tilted to dump a load (used to carry prisoners to execution during the French Revolution)

tumescence – swollen; somewhat tumid

tumid – **1.** swollen, distended **2.** overblown,; bombastic: *tumid political prose*

tump¹ (*noun*) – a hillock; or a clump of trees, shrubs, or grass, esp. in a dry spot in a bog

tump² (*verb*) – *Southern US*: to overturn, or to tip over

tunic – a papery protective cover on certain bulbs, such as the onion. A bulb with a tunic is **turnicate**; one without is **imbricate**.

tunnel vision – **1.** inability to clearly perceive things unless they are close to the center of the field of view. **2.** *informal* the tendency to focus exclusively on a limited view

tuppenny-ha'penny – *British slang*: inferior and trivial

Tupperware – *eponym; trademark*: a range of plastic containers, etc., sold exclusively at 'parties' for potential buyers (proprietary name)

tuque or **toque** (*Canadian*; rhymes with *duke*) – a **knitted cap** in the form of a closed bag: one end is tucked into the other to form the cap

turdine – pertaining to thrushes

turkey (etymology) – how did this native American bird become named for a country 4,000 miles away? Turkeys first arrived in England from Spain, where they had been brought by Cortés in 1519. The English mistakenly believed they had come from Turkey.

turnicate – see *tunic*

turnpike – originally, a spike barrier obstructing a road, as a defense. Later, *turnpike* came to mean 'a tollbooth obstructing a road', the road coming to be called a 'turnpike road', and then simply a 'turnpike'.

turpitude – depravity, baseness or base act; shameful wickedness

Turveydrop – *eponym*: a perfect model of deportment (*Turveydropdom; Turveydropian*)

tush – an exclamation, expressing disapproval, impatience, or dismissal

tushery – high-flown, pretentious writing, usually larded with archaic words (the sort of writing in which the characters say "Tush, tush.")

tuxedo – a *toponym*. No definition needed

twee – *Brit*: affectedly quaint, pretty or sentimental

Tweedledum & Tweedledee – *eponym*: two individuals or groups that are practically indistinguishable

twill – a fabric woven to have a surface of parallel diagonal ridges

twiss (etymology) – a chamber pot

twitten – *Sussex dial.*: a narrow path or passage between two walls or hedges

twitterpated – love-struck, smitten [nonce word, in the movie *Bambi*]

two bits – a spanish coin splittable into 8 parts (pieces of eight), each a bit; hence two bits = a quarter (see *coins and currency*)

twonie – *slang*: Canadian two-dollar coin

twy – a meteor squall on the coasts

tycoon (etymology) – from Japanese (and ultimately Chinese) meaning "'great lord"

typhlobasia – kissing with the eyes closed

Typhoid Mary – *eponym*: one who, by circumstances, spreads something undesirable (contrast **Johnny Appleseed**, though not listed in dictionaries as a word: one who seeds and spreads something desirable.)

[tyromancy](#) – divination by cheese [dictionary at *mancy* lists 54 form of divination]

[tzigane](#) (accent on 2nd syllable) – a Hungarian gypsy [also seems to be used to mean 'gypsy music', though I don't find that definition in the dictionaries]